

Born Again of the People: Luis Taruc and Peasant Ideology in Philippine Revolutionary Politics

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Luis Taruc was one of the twentieth century's most prominent peasant revolutionaries. His death in May 2005 at the age of 91 is cause for reflection upon the factors that contributed to his becoming one of the most tragic figures in recent Philippine history, despite his ongoing popularity among the peasants of Luzon. This study examines oral traditions, contrasts Socialist and Communist song lyrics and theatrical productions, and engages hitherto overlooked peasant beliefs in reincarnation to cast new light on the schism in leftist politics in the Philippines in the mid-twentieth century. The Communist meta-narrative ultimately failed to resonate with Filipino peasants, not only because of the military and economic power of the United States and Philippine Republican governments, but because Taruc (to the chagrin and frustration of his comrades-turned-adversaries in the Communist Party) engaged and ultimately embodied certain peasant counter micro-narratives.

Luis Taruc a été l'un des plus grands artisans de la révolution paysanne des Philippines du XX^e siècle. Son décès, en mai 2005, à l'âge de 91 ans invite à réfléchir aux facteurs qui ont contribué à faire de lui l'une des figures les plus tragiques de l'histoire récente des Philippines en dépit de sa popularité constante auprès des paysans de Luzon. Cette étude examine les traditions orales, compare les paroles des chansons et les productions théâtrales socialistes et communistes et se penche sur les croyances paysannes, négligées, de la réincarnation pour jeter un éclairage nouveau sur le schisme à l'intérieur de la politique de gauche des Philippines au milieu du XX^e siècle. Le métadiscours communiste n'a finalement pas trouvé écho chez les paysans philippins, non seulement à cause de la puissance militaire et économique des gouvernements républicains des États-Unis et des Philippines,

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mais également parce que Taruc (au grand dam de ses camarades devenus adversaires du Parti communiste) a épousé et fini par incarner certains micro-discours paysans rivaux.

IT WAS A BLISTERING hot afternoon in January 1996. The horns of brightly decorated “Jeepneys” honked incessantly outside the open window, mixing with the sooty dark blue smoke of countless motorized “tricycles” and making conversation difficult. In the open doorway that separated the HUKBALAHAP veterans’ dimly lit, back-room office from the little street-side *sari sari* store stood a man in his mid-thirties wearing dusty white cotton pants and shirt and holding a straw sombrero — a priest of the “independent Catholic Church.” Together with two friends, he had travelled all day in a dilapidated vehicle along the narrow concrete provincial roads of Pampanga, then the crowded, stop-and-go eight-lane freeway leading into Metro Manila. His was the seventh delegation that day seeking the elderly Taruc’s council and assistance. The man waited silently while his companions lingered near the front of the store, drinking tepid Coke through straws inserted into plastic baggies. He smiled nervously at me as I, too, sat waiting with my pen, open notebook, and tape recorder for Taruc to end his phone conversation with an aide to Jose De Venecia, the Speaker of the Republic of the Philippines’ House of Representatives. De Venecia wanted to know if the old “Huk Supremo” would be guest of honour at a special dinner he was hosting for representatives of various peasant organizations from throughout the Philippine archipelago. Before accepting, Taruc asked for confirmation that the Speaker would fulfil his commitment to assist Huk veterans of the Second World War in establishing viable agricultural cooperatives. As Taruc spoke, a large brown rat scurried across the floor, over his shoe, up a water pipe, and into a hole in the wall behind the desk. When Taruc hung up the phone, the man in the doorway quickly stepped forward, dropped to one knee, bowed his head reverently, and kissed Taruc’s hand. It went much beyond the typical Filipino *mag mano* greeting — a custom in which an Elder bestows a blessing by allowing the back of his or her hand to be raised to the forehead of a younger Filipino — and was more akin to the kissing of the Pope’s ring. Taruc appeared embarrassed by the actions and quickly pulled his hand away, gestured for the man to stand, and said, “I told you before, it is not necessary.” Then, with a mildly self-conscious smile, the aged guerrilla leader turned to me and explained, “These people think I am Felipe Salvador.” My confusion must have been obvious, and so Taruc light-heartedly asked the man, “Why do you think I am Salvador? Salvador died a long time ago.” The visitor replied, “Ah, no Sir. We know you are Salvador; everyone knows. Won’t you help us?”

As a peasant from the small village of San Luis in the agricultural province of Pampanga (roughly 100 kilometres north of Manila) who went on

to become a leading figure in mid-twentieth-century Philippine revolutionary politics, Luis M. Taruc made much of having been “born of the people.”¹ What those outside the *barrios* of Central Luzon appreciate less is that much of Taruc’s appeal and charm was tied to the popular belief that he had been “re-born” of the people — the reincarnation of the turn-of-the-century revolutionary leader and mystic, Felipe Salvador. This belief, and in particular Taruc’s refusal to reject or denounce it, was not only the source of a major heretofore unexplored rift between Taruc and his Communist comrades, but was, from the perspective of those on both sides of this dispute, indicative of all that was wrong with the ideology of their opponents within “the movement.”

Throughout his life, Taruc traded in the currency of peasant belief and Filipino cultural mores to counter not only the military power of the United-States-backed Philippine government and the economic juggernaut of American client capitalism, but what he later referred to as the “bullshitism” of his former “Bolshevik” comrades in the inner sanctum of the Philippine Communist Party (PKP). Previously overlooked aspects of Taruc’s life history help cast new light on the schism within Philippine leftist politics. This study offers preliminary observations concerning the causes of the failure of the Communist meta-narrative in the face of competing peasant micro-narratives (an issue linked to the challenge presented to local cultural beliefs and values by new sources of externally justified social or political authority), as revealed through a comparison of the Communists’ and Taruc’s engagement with popular communications media. Certain expressions of Taruc’s identity (for instance, as associated with the publication of his first autobiography) worked to freeze his ideological persona within the eyes of the public, making it difficult for him to adjust to subsequent circumstances. These developments are situated within the context created by the shifting expressions of the guerrilla leader’s identity as he struggled to remain relevant within a rapidly changing Philippine society.

Aletta Biersack, in analysing the “poetics of displacement” that characterized colonial encounters throughout Oceania, reminds us that the historical outcome of colonialism and imperialism has not been the universal and complete destruction of indigenous societies, but rather a world in which the “other” has found new ways to be different.² For Taruc, being different was largely a matter of embracing the need for change within Filipino society on Filipino terms. Among those advocating the value of local or community-focused studies, it has become

1 Taruc’s 1953 autobiography is entitled *Born of the People* (New York: International Publishers, 1953).

2 Aletta Biersack, “Introduction: History and Theory in Anthropology,” in Aletta Biersack, ed., *Clio in Oceania: Toward a Historical Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p. 12.

commonplace to point out that the axis of domination and subordination linking the local unit to the global system holds the potential for multiple historical expressions. The various directions Philippine history “might have taken” as a result of Taruc’s clashes with hard-line ideologues within the PKP, and his awkward accommodation of Ferdinand Marcos’s right-wing politics following his conditional pardon and release from prison in 1968, bear testimony that colonized communities are not without agency and that local historical analysis, adequately contextualized, can provide revealing insights into global processes and phenomena.

To assess the expression and cause of mid-twentieth-century Philippine peasant unrest, and then to determine what it was about Filipino peasant ideology that ultimately made it impervious to the official Communist meta-narrative, we must re-situate our understanding of communism itself. While from one perspective communism was clearly an anti-western ideology, if approached from another — perhaps that of non-literate peasants from Central Luzon — it might better be conceived as just another western, Euro-centred meta-narrative vying for primacy on the intellectual and military battlefield that was coming to be known as the “Developing World.”

An expanded purview of leftist politics to include indigenous and peasant epistemologies can lead to an appreciation of the incompleteness of interpretive models attributing the supposed success of mid-twentieth-century counterinsurgency primarily to the superiority of the military machine of the U.S.-sponsored Philippine government. Likewise, the assessment advanced by certain frustrated members of the Communist movement, attributing the PKP’s lack of success to the nefarious machinations of petty bourgeois egoists such as Taruc (or by Taruc’s counter accusations that his enemies were closed-minded ideologues) proves equally unsatisfying. Whereas the former provides an important broad economic and political context, and the latter ideological insights into organizational conflicts, neither necessarily reveals much about the peasant perspective as shaped by cultural tradition and personality.³

3 Broader studies emphasizing the neo-colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States include Renato Constantino and Letizia Constantino, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1992); William J. Pomeroy, *An American-made Tragedy: Neo-Colonialism and Dictatorship in the Philippines* (New York: International Publishers, 1974) and *American Neocolonialism: Its Emergence in the Philippines and Asia* (New York: International Publishers, 1970); Stephen Rosskamm Shalom, *The United States and the Philippines: A Study of Neocolonialism* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1981); Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989); Jose Maria Sison, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leaders’ View* (New York: Crane Russak, 1989). Classic strategic and military studies of Philippine peasant rebellion include Robert R. Smith, “The Hukbalahap Insurgency: Economic, Political and Military Factors” (Washington, DC, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1963); A. H. Peterson, G. C. Reinhardt, and E. E. Conger, eds. *Symposium of the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional*

Certainly, within the scholarship describing the Philippine peasant rebellion, insufficient attention has been paid to the interplay of micro- and meta-narratives. As Vina A. Lanzona recently pointed out, the secondary literature on the Huk rebellion in particular remains especially meagre.⁴ What scholarship does exist has been primarily concerned with determining the expression and causes of peasant unrest and assessing the strengths of various insurgency and anti-insurgency programmes. Few works have brought genuinely innovative and original methodologies and insights to bear. Among those that have are Reynaldo Clemenña Iletto's *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910*, Benedict J. Kerkvliet's *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, and Jeff Goodwin's "The Libidinal Constitution of a High-Risk Social Movement: Affectual Ties and Solidarity in the Huk Rebellion, 1946 to 1954."⁵

Warfare: The Philippine Huk Campaign (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1963); Richard M. Leighton, Ralph Sanders, and Jose N. Tinio, "The HUK Rebellion: A Case Study in the Social Dynamics of Insurrection" (Washington, DC, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, March 1964); Irwin D. Smith, "The Philippine Operation Against the Huks: Do Lessons Learned Have Application Today?" (Carlisle Barracks, PA, US Army War College, January 24, 1968); Clifford M. White, "Why Insurgency Was Defeated in the Philippines" (Carlisle Barracks, PA, US Army War College, 1967); Eduardo Lachica, *The Huks: Philippine Agrarian Society in Revolt* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Reginald J. Swarbrick, "The Evolution of Communist Insurgency in the Philippines" (Quantico, VA, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, June 7, 1983); Fred Poole and Max Vanz, *Revolution in the Philippines: The United States in a Hall of Cracked Mirrors* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Major Lawrence M. Greenberg, "The Hukbalahap Insurrection: A Case Study of a Successful Anti-Insurgency Operation in the Philippines, 1946–1955" (Analysis Branch, US Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 1987); D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Thomas Erik Miller, "Counterinsurgency and Operational Art: Is the Joint Campaign Planning Model Adequate?" (PhD dissertation, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, 2003). An innovative early attempt at understanding Huk success through quantification matrix methodologies is found in Edward J. Mitchell's "Some Econometrics of the Huk Rebellion," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 43 (1969), pp. 1159–1171. Relevant communist memoirs and reflections include William Pomeroy, *The Forest: A Personal History of the Huk Guerrilla Struggle in the Philippines* (New York: International Publishers, 1963); Alfredo B. Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2nd ed., 1990); James S. Allen, *The Radical Left on the Eve of the War: A Political Memoir* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies Inc., 1985); Dr. Jesus B. Lava, *Memoirs of a Communist* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2002); and, of course, Taruc's two autobiographies, *Born of the People* and *He Who Rides the Tiger: The Story of an Asian Guerrilla Leader* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967).

4 Vina A. Lanzona, "Romancing a Revolutionary," in Alfred W. McCoy, ed., *Lives at the Margin: Biography of Filipinos Obscure, Ordinary, and Heroic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p. 232.

5 Reynaldo Clemenña Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979); Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979);

Because the subjects of Iletto's study were largely illiterate and left no documentary record of their own, he chose as his methodology a close textual analysis of those aspects of peasant orality that were preserved by members of the elite class, namely songs and poetry (*awit*) and the popular Easter passion (*pasyon*) plays. From these records, Iletto argued that aspects of Roman Catholic belief and faith had been integrated into peasant epistemology to become central elements of Philippine revolutionary ideology. Indeed, he argued that indigenous Filipino interpretations of Roman Catholicism emphasizing Christ as catalyst of social change were so intricately woven into revolutionary ideology as to be indistinguishable.⁶

Examining the later Huk peasant uprising primarily through the methodological lens of memory ethnography, Kerkvliet demonstrated that, while the objectives of the Philippine Communist intelligentsia in the 1950s were clearly cast within the broader Cold War context, they were nonetheless out of step with the goals of the common Filipinos. Kerkvliet determined that people in the rural *barrios* were less interested in overthrowing the old order than they were in repairing the damage caused to their mutually enriching (if imbalanced) relationship with the feudal elite brought about by the Philippine government's engagement with the modern global capitalist economy.⁷

In a completely different vein, Goodwin studied Huk/Communist political cohesiveness within the context of sexual and familial solidarity. Employing a neo-Freudian analysis, he used captured Politburo records and the published memoirs of Taruc and other leading Huk historical figures to argue that sexual attraction and pair bonding worked to undermine the relationships of senior Communist officials. For Goodwin, the "problem of solidarity" among the Philippine Communists was in part a product of the conflicting alliances and jealousies ("libidinal withdrawal") that inevitably emerge when transient sex partnering is regarded as a necessity feature of revolutionary politics.⁸

Building upon Iletto's, Kerkvliet's, and Goodwin's works, this study is based largely on recorded interviews and conversations with Taruc conducted during research trips to Manila in 1994, 1996, and 2004, as well as regular correspondence and occasional long-distance phone conversations with the old Huk Supremo between 1990 and his death in 2005. It also relies on formal interviews conducted in 1996 with nine Huk veterans,

Jeff Goodwin, "The Libidinal Constitution of a High-risk Social Movement: Affectual Ties and Solidarity in the Huk Rebellion, 1945 to 1954," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 62, no. 1 (February 1997), pp. 53–69.

6 Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution*.

7 Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*.

8 Goodwin, "The Libidinal Constitution of a High-risk Social Movement."

three of whom were prominent members of the “Lava-faction” who opposed Taruc’s leadership in favour of the brothers Jose and Jesus Lava. Likewise, recognizing that women’s voices have been particularly absent from discussion on the Huk rebellion and echoing Vina Lanzona’s observation that the Huk “rebellion may have failed in part because the Huk organization was unsuccessful in addressing both the immediate needs and the deep-seated aspirations of their participants, especially women,” I sought out and interviewed three female Huk veterans in 1996. In 2003 I travelled to London, England, and interviewed Celia Mariano (the only female member of the PKP Politburo) and her husband, American-born William Pomeroy.

Finally, this study is also informed by observations of individuals and large groups of people as they interacted with Taruc when he visited their villages, as well as subsequent casual conversations with these individuals. Spirituality, culture, tradition, and sexuality all worked to shape not only the man, but the way he was perceived by others. I examine the way Taruc adapted his image to illustrate where and when its expression deviated from that presented in his two autobiographies (both of which were altered by outsiders who had a vested interest in using Taruc to further their own ideological agendas). Throughout, every attempt has been made to be sensitive to the fact that memory is less a window to the past than it is a reconstructed interpretation of what went before, told from the standpoint of the present and based on contemporary needs and issues.⁹ Taruc and his detractors all had a vested interest in presenting a certain image of themselves, and they may have been motivated to convey a revisionist interpretation of one another’s lives and roles in Philippine history. Accordingly, oral interviews have been used cautiously and, where possible, in conjunction with supportive information from other living and documentary sources.

Luis Taruc was a master of public relations and mass mobilization. An articulate and passionate speaker with a humble sincere demeanour, he retained until his death at age 91 a strong public following, especially among the peasants of Central Luzon. He was also a controversial man, critiqued by those on the extreme left and right of Philippine politics as being ideologically inconsistent and politically opportunistic — accusations he rejected.

As a young man in the 1930s, Taruc became the acolyte of Don Pedro Abad Santos, a Pampanga lawyer and the founder of the Philippine Socialist Party (PSP). In 1939, despite his misgivings, Taruc deferred to his mentor and played a key role in helping Santos merge the Philippine Socialist and Communist Parties into the single Party Komunista

9 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 40.

Pilippinas (PKP). Following the Japanese invasion in late 1941, the nearly two dozen United Front delegates unanimously elected Taruc to become Commander-in-Chief of the HUKBALAHAP (a Filipino acronym for *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon*, or People's Anti-Japanese Army), one of the most successful resistance movements of the Second World War. During the war, his forces kept vast regions of the Philippines' most productive agricultural lands out of Japanese hands and, in the process, initiated land reform and established democratic institutions on those *haciendas* abandoned by members of the feudal elite, who had been supporters of the right-wing Catholic Flange movement. After the war, he was elected to the Philippine Congress under the banner of the Democratic Alliance Party, which derived support from liberal progressive and leftist elements alike. Taruc's opposition to a controversial constitutional amendment that would have given American businessmen "parity rights" with Filipino citizens, however, led former members of the Japanese collaborator puppet government to expel Taruc and several other opposition members illegally from Congress. Without Taruc's opposing vote, the parity amendment passed. Incensed, Taruc left Manila and returned to the mountains to resume his position as Commander-in-Chief of a revitalized Huk movement, now renamed *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (People's Liberation Army), or HMB.

Though the HMB experienced many successes in its first years, by 1953 the situation was growing desperate. As HMB fortunes declined, Taruc's already strained relations with powerbrokers within the PKP Politburo rapidly deteriorated. In early 1954 hard-line Stalinists not only removed Taruc from the Politburo, but replaced him with another commander-in-chief of the Huk army. When he later advocated replacing armed conflict with parliamentary means and then privately initiated unauthorized peace talks with the Philippine government, he was summarily expelled from the PKP and denounced as a renegade. Seeking to exploit the Communist fracture and recognizing Taruc's continuing appeal among rank-and-file Huks, President Magsaysay promised Taruc that the Philippine government would negotiate an amnesty, but when Taruc showed up to begin talks in May 1954 he was imprisoned.

In 1968, following the publication of his second autobiography, which severely critiqued the PKP leadership of Jesus and Jose Lava and Castro Alejandrino (while still retaining criticism for American economic imperialism and Philippine feudal land tenureship), Taruc was given executive clemency by President Ferdinand Marcos and released from prison. After his release Taruc became, in the words of Alfredo B. Saulo, "probably the most sought-after guest speaker in the country, averaging twenty-four speaking engagements a month."¹⁰ While severe

10 Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*, p. 134.

arthritis and chronic heart problems eventually compelled him to relax his schedule, he nonetheless maintained an active public presence until just weeks before his death in May 2005. In numerous conversations, he described his ideology as “Nationalistic Christian Democratic Socialism,” though people familiar with the European or North American uses of these terms will find that the significance Taruc ascribed to them does not perfectly mirror their generally accepted western meanings. His concept of socialism, for example, is perhaps better understood as grass-roots populism. It has more in common with Jeffersonianism than either Marxism or Maoism.¹¹ Throughout his career he never advocated the collectivization of land, but rather its redistribution from the feudal land-owners to the peasants who tilled the soil — a point that caused tensions with those in the PKP inner circle, who insisted that such promises should be regarded as mere expediency and that the real goal remained collectivization. In his later years, Taruc repeatedly explained that farmer’s cooperatives were the ideal alternative to the lingering feudal land tenure system, offering peasants profit-driven motivation and the security of collective bargaining power. Likewise, the Christian Democratic side of his ideology was similar to the Liberation Theology now typically associated with South America.

Nationalism was by far the most vexing feature of Taruc’s ideology. It was also, however, what most clearly associated him in the minds of peasants with an earlier generation of Filipino leaders who had heroically opposed Spanish imperialism, American colonialism, and later Commonwealth status — and by definition what most visibly distinguished him from the Stalinist members of the PKP Politburo. As early as 1951 American scholars like Russell Fifield had already identified Taruc as “the most nationalistic of the present Hukbalahap leaders, despite his belief in Communism.”¹² By the time he had entered his twilight years, Taruc was still quick to drop the clever catch-phrases he had earlier developed to explain his position. “I am a Filipino first and a socialist second,” he would frequently assert, before going on to explain that nationalism could be a means of overcoming class or regional identities. Only when subverted to narrow class interests, he assured his listeners, could nationalist rhetoric become a tool for prejudice or militaristic aggression. In this way, Taruc’s understanding of nationalism was in keeping with what he had learned as a child in schools run by American teachers. In particular, it was derived from eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse on

11 For a vehement Marxist/Maoist critique of Taruc’s definition of socialism, see Amado Geurrero [Jose Ma Sison], *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Manila: Pulang Tala Publishers, 1971), excerpts of which are found in Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*, chap. 23, pp. 128–134.

12 Russell H. Fifield, “The Hukbalahap Today,” *Far Eastern Survey* (American Institute of Pacific Relations), January 24, 1951, p. 15.

the “General Will” as articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his treatise *The Social Contract*: namely, that people must act in a manner that is in society’s collective best interest, and the will of the majority is not necessarily correct or best.¹³ For Taruc, the principal society was the Filipino nation, not the underclass. His entire political career was characterized by efforts to reach out and cooperate with progressive members of the professional and land-holding classes — men like his mentor Abad Santos. This broadness in Taruc’s definition of nationalism infuriated his Communist colleagues, for, as he explained in 1994, it enabled him to perceive certain prominent “class enemies” as potential allies:

I explain to the peasants, workers, others, the simple fundamentals of socialism — as a foreseeable possible economic way of life [in society] but it can and must come only as a result of evolution, not by sudden violent bloody revolution propelled by blind hate and vindictive anger. Whatever greed and cruelty there are among feudal landlords and monopolistic capitalists, eventually enough numbers of educated, humane, with foresight, elements will surface, to help improve democracy and eventually influence the socio-economic political system to really work as “of the people, by the people and for the people.”¹⁴

To appreciate the powerful appeal Luis Taruc’s message held among peasants, however, we must engage more than his political philosophy. His message resonated in part because Taruc was regarded by many to be the reincarnation of the turn-of-the-century revolutionary and mystic, Felipe Salvador. To date, this facet of the Huk Supremo’s identity has remained unexplored by scholars — likely because it is not mentioned in either of his two published autobiographies, *Born of the People* (1953) and *He Who Rides the Tiger* (1967), and because Taruc himself found the belief somewhat troubling and embarrassing.

From 1894, throughout the revolution against Spain, beyond his capture by American soldiers in 1910, and until subsequent execution in 1912, Felipe Salvador had been the charismatic leader of the Santa Iglesia — a revolutionary religious movement that flourished throughout Central Luzon.¹⁵ Salvador came from humble origins (and rumours circulated

13 Enlightenment philosophy informed much of Taruc’s thinking. As a child growing up in an American colony, he was among the first Filipino generation to receive publicly funded universal education. Taruc revelled in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine (personal communication).

14 Taruc to author, June 30, 1994. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent correspondence and audio recordings are from the author’s personal collection.

15 For further information on Salvador, see David R. Sturtevant, *Uprisings in the Philippines, 1840–1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), especially pp. 235–239.

that he was the illegitimate child of a Franciscan friar). According to Reynaldo Ileto, peasants believed that Salvador communicated directly with God from the slopes of Mt. Arayat, the giant sacred volcano that dominates central Luzon's otherwise flat landscape. Salvador's "prophetic vision brought forth an image of independence inextricably linked with the millennium — there would be a great flood or fire that would wipe out unbelievers, and after the purge there would be a rain of gold and jewels for the faithful. Land and other property would be redistributed. Universal brotherhood among men would reign."¹⁶

During the 1898 revolution, Salvador became a colonel in the *Kataastaasang at Kagalanggalang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (Katipunan, or simply KKK for short), or in English "The Most Venerable Supreme Society of the Sons of the People." When the United States annexed the Philippines from Spain in 1898, the KKK redirected its revolutionary struggle for independence against the new American colonizers. By 1901 the American military had destroyed the regular Katipunan forces, leaving only sporadic guerrilla units to carry on the fight. After 1903 Salvador's Santa Iglesia was the only significant guerrilla force still operating. American observers claimed that, while Salvador retained only 200 armed men, he commanded over 50,000 active supporters.¹⁷

According to accounts I received in 1996 from people in San Luis and Candaba Pampanga, when news reached the *barrios* that Salvador had been killed, people everywhere were shocked. God, too, was thought to have been taken by surprise: "Perhaps his back was turned?" According to these peasant oral traditions, God did not accept Salvador's execution. He sent Salvador's spirit back to earth "to be reincarnated in somebody else." The spirit "hovered around waiting for a child to be born."¹⁸

By coincidence or through divine planning, Luis Taruc was born shortly after Salvador's death. Taruc's parents were peasants, and both his grandfathers had been Katipunan veterans who had known Felipe Salvador personally. Many of his family had been members of the Santa Iglesia. When Taruc was still a child, people in his *barrio* began to comment that Taruc was "different." Unlike other boys, who generally wanted to play games, Taruc supposedly preferred listening to his grandfathers recount their

For a quick but focused overview of Salvador's career, see Paul Dimayuga, "Messianic Leaders of the Revolution," in Hector Santos, ed., *Philippine Centennial Series* [online publication, Philippine History Group of Los Angeles], retrieved September 30, 2007 from www.bibingka.com/phg/religious/.

¹⁶ Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, p. 261.

¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 1914, quoted in Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, p. 261.

¹⁸ The information I acquired in casual conversation with Pampanga villagers was corroborated and elaborated upon by Taruc in subsequent conversations (for example, Taruc in conversation with author, January 25, 1996, Tape #8).

revolutionary experiences.¹⁹ He also took a great interest in social inequality and the injustice of Philippine feudalism. It became apparent to many that God had instructed Salvador to select Taruc as his reincarnation. According to Taruc:

When I was about fifteen or eighteen — when I got rebellious — to my surprise they began saying I was Salvador's reincarnation. They began kissing my hands. Why would they do that? They said they heard a voice — they are very good at hearing voices [chuckles] — that told them God had chosen me for Felipe Salvador's soul to enter. My own parents and their first cousins living around our *barrio* were of the same belief. So I was amazed.... How to deny it? I cannot. So, my only other choice is how to prove to them that I am worthy of that belief — without getting any deeper into the spiritual side of their belief.²⁰

In pragmatically adopting a secularized version of Salvador's message and goals, Taruc confirmed people's faith that he was the reincarnation. In a dramatic application of Marshall McLuhan's observation that the medium becomes the message, from that point onward Taruc's words and actions were no longer considered to be entirely his own; they carried the weight of Salvador, the Santa Iglesia, and God. It is difficult, therefore, to assess the extent to which Taruc's message resonated because it was appealing, or was appealing because it was Taruc's.

In the early 1930s, at the encouragement of an uncle who was a firm believer in the reincarnation and who sought to ensure that his nephew lived up to the expectations of the faithful, Taruc joined the Philippine Socialist Party (PSP).²¹ Under the mentorship of PSP founder Don Pedro Abad Santos, Taruc became a full-time Party organizer. He began to acquire a podium from which to reach a broader peasant audience and engaged in communication strategies that reinforced the Salvador connection while demonstrating his engagement with, and commitment to, peasant culture and belief. Taruc's rise was not immediate, however. One of his initial PSP duties involved acting as a "curtain raiser" for the Socialists' popular travelling drama group.

Within the Philippines, theatrical productions have long been associated with what colonial overseers have correctly regarded as political and social sedition. The best documented and most studied of the "seditious plays" emerged during the anti-Spanish rebellion and flourished during the first

19 Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, p. 12.

20 Taruc in conversation with author, January 25, 1996, Tape #8. This story was also told to me by others living in the San Luis-Candaba area.

21 In neither autobiography does Taruc mention the Salvador connection or his uncle's religious motivation for introducing him to Abad Santos.

years of American colonial rule. Paul Rodell traces the antecedents of these dramas to the church-sponsored comedic *moro-moro* plays of the seventeenth century, which depicted conflicts between Christians and Mohammedans. A century later, the structure and style, if not the content, of the *moro-moro* was adopted by Filipino playwrights keen to contribute to the growing cause of independence. Publicly endorsed by the short-lived Philippine Republican government of 1898 to bolster the anti-Spanish cause, the plays necessarily assumed more subtle and symbolic expressions after the American occupation, when Uncle Sam became the new target for derision. According to Rodell, the seditious plays were immensely popular and politically potent, because they successfully melded the European theatric tradition with "Philippine stories and situations based on local values."²² Moreover, as Vincent Rafael has noted in a study that principally explores the gendered dimensions of these dramas, their projection of a glorious future for all Filipinos rendered seditious plays "extraordinarily popular among both working class audiences and members of the nationalist elite."²³ The Socialist plays in which Taruc participated during the 1930s grew out of these earlier dramatic traditions, but, in merging calls for social change with more familiar advocacy for political independence from the United States, they took radical theatre to a new political level.

Appreciating Taruc's abilities, the Socialist leaders soon promoted him from stagehand to actor. Unfortunately, unlike the more formal productions of the early American colonial period, the scripts for these plays were never in written form; all we know about them come from people's recollections. From what I have been told, the Socialist "one-act skits" were immensely popular among the *barrio* people, who remembered the earlier anti-Spanish and anti-American dramas and were hungry for something other than contemporary American vaudeville.

The actors' arrival occasioned an atmosphere similar to that of a community fiesta. Abad Santos is said to have emphasized psychology over economic

22 Paul A. Rodell, "Philippine 'Seditious Plays,'" *Asian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (April 1974), p. 112. More recently, Rodell has placed the seditious plays within a broader historical context, examining their legacy in the contemporary period. See Paul A. Rodell, *Culture and Customs of the Philippines* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2001), especially pp. 150–153. Like other works in Philippine historiography, however, Rodell's work fails to make the connection between the seditious plays of the 1898–1904 period and those used by socialists in the 1930s. Likewise, in a thoughtful discussion of the roles of class and gender in "radical nationalist theatre" staged during the years of Marcos's martial law, Michael H. Bodden fails to link the modern expressions with the Socialist dramatic traditions of the interwar years. See Michael H. Bodden, "Class, Gender, and the Contours of Nationalism in the Culture of Philippine Radical Theater," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2/3 (1996), pp. 24–50.

23 Vincent L. Rafael, "White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance in the US Colonization of the Philippines," in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 206.

theory, and, to attract and engage audiences, the plays were light on overt socialist theory.²⁴ The historical theorist Hayden White has advanced a method for interpreting texts according to their tropological content.²⁵ Applying White's model of analysis, one may consider the Philippine Socialist Party's plays to have conveyed meaning primarily through modes of emplotment: that is, they did not necessarily make their point through formal explicit argument, but through the literary form they reflected. Such a strategy served a number of purposes, not the least of which was that the dramas were not blatantly subversive when performed in this way and therefore could be staged publicly without fear of state reprisal.

The skits apparently took three forms: comedy, romance, and tragedy. Comedies regularly poked fun at local landlords, who were portrayed as American-mimicking, one-dimensional clowns lacking the skills or strength to work their own land. Other dramas featured romance stories between young peasant couples whose love was destroyed when a landlord's son came and stole the young woman as his own bride. Peasants were shown that, even if one of their daughters were "fortunate" enough to marry an *ilustrado*, their lives would be miserable. Isolated from her own family and her true love, the peasant girl of the Socialist dramas lived a shallow, lonely life in the landlord's *hacienda*. Disconnected from the land, the *ilustrados* were not unlike the Spanish and American colonists. Wealth and riches could not bring the peasant girl the genuine happiness she had known in the *barrio*. In this way, the Socialist dramas played on notions of class and nationalism in a manner reminiscent of the seditious plays of the early American era. Rather than targeting a predominantly middle-class, urban audience, however, they sought to convince the peasants that nationalism and social justice were linked causes and that, to be true Filipinos, the landlords needed to change and redirect their allegiances away from the American overlords toward their peasant countrymen. In a country where only a few generations earlier the term "Filipino" had been used exclusively to refer to people of Spanish descent born in the Philippines, this was a radical deployment of nationalist rhetoric.

Socialist drama storylines often focused on the tragedy of a peasant family that, through no fault of its own, suffered a poor harvest and could not afford to pay the landlord his 70-per-cent share of the crop. In such circumstances, Filipino cultural dictates, forged over generations of historical precedent and expressed in the concept of *utang na loob* (reciprocal indebtedness of one's soul),²⁶ obligate a landlord to assist his

24 Taruc, *Born of the People*, p. 33.

25 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, NJ: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 7–11.

26 See Virgilio G. Enriquez, "Kapwa: A Core Concept in Filipino Social Psychology," in Virgilio G. Enriquez, ed., *Philippine World View* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986),

tenant by reducing the loan, or at least deferring it without interest. In the skits, however, the landlord brazenly violates cultural values and compels the tenant to pay or face a jail sentence, thereby causing the farmer great economic hardship and much social embarrassment.

Benedict J. Kerkvliet provides an important historical context for these plays. While Kerkvliet does not discuss communication media directly, he documents how the traditional patron-client relationship between landowner and tenant underwent a dramatic shift under American occupation beginning in the 1920s. Rapid population growth, agricultural industrialization, and foreign investment resulted in *ilustrados* no longer feeling the sort of social and cultural obligation toward their tenants characteristic of earlier periods. Rice and sugar plantations were transformed from communities where landowners and tenants cooperated to ensure one another's well-being into economic enterprises where tenants assumed the role of exploited contract labourers.²⁷ In such an environment, the Socialist skits (which ended with the landlord being denounced as *walang hiya* — without shame, the worst Philippine insult — while the farmers found new security through the establishment of cooperatives and locally controlled lending institutions) showed that being a good citizen meant placing cultural obligations before the colonizer's rule of law.

Taruc's stage presence in theatrical productions that spoke to peasants in terms they found intelligible and meaningful, combined with the pervasive and apparently growing belief that he was Salvador's reincarnation, soon led him to achieve broad celebrity status — a situation that his future Communist colleagues would initially attempt to turn to the Party's advantage and then later regret and denounce.²⁸ Aside from acting, Taruc also delivered lectures to the *barrio* crowds, attempting to motivate them to political action. Through this activity he quickly learned the importance of making his message locally relevant — of engaging the peasants through a local narrative they could appreciate:

At first I was very green. Entering a *barrio* out of the blue, a complete stranger, I would launch immediately into an attack on capitalism in general, on the system itself. Half the time the peasants would not know what I was talking about, and if they listened, it would be more out of politeness than interest. . . .

pp. 6–19. See also Clementino Balasabas, Jr., "How Social Power Operates in Philippine Society: A Critical Analysis," in Douglas J. Elwood, *Alternatives to Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Filipino People Power* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1989), pp. 1–13.

²⁷ Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*.

²⁸ The PKP selected Taruc as the Party's spokesman, and in the late 1940s and early 1950s all PKP public statements were signed by Luis Taruc — although he wrote very few of them himself. This elevated Taruc's status even further in the public eye. Later, when the Party denounced Taruc, the report documenting his "errors" was titled "Life Cycle of Careerism" (William Pomeroy, interview with the author, April 26, 2003).

I was wondering what I was doing wrong, and I thought about the meaning of the people's organization. It must be of the people, close to them, and must deal with their problems in their terms. It must be something they can grasp and feel with as much intimacy as the handle of a plow, it must learn from the people as well as teach them. . . . I got up and walked over to a man with a cock and opened a discussion on the merits of roosters. I learned he was deep in debt and used the rooster's winnings to pay out the interest. What kind of debts? That night I spoke on landlord usury. After that, when I entered a *barrio*, I first sounded out the people about their problems and grievances, and then spoke to the people in their own terms.²⁹

In addition to theatrical productions, the Socialist Party also demonstrated to peasants that the Party "spoke their language" by composing and performing poetic revolutionary songs (*awit*). I was first exposed to these songs in 1994, when I was privileged to hear a group of elderly men and women in a Pampanga *barrio* reminiscing about "the old times" with the assistance of a guitar. Naturally, none of the songs was in English; not until the following day, after I questioned a number of fluent Tagalog and Kapampangan speakers about the lyrics and their meaning, was I able to begin appreciating the songs as more than beautiful and moving melodies. Some of the songs were translated for me in their entirety at that time, but in most cases I was simply provided synoptic summaries or complete translations of only certain stanzas and lyrics that my peasant consultants selected according to their own criteria. Before each translation, people of their own accord carefully and thoughtfully classified the songs as either "Socialist" or "Communist" and then dated them as arising during either the pre-war period, the "Japanese times," or the post-World-War-II "Huk insurrection" (or "HMB times").

From these summaries and select quotations, one can discern important differences between the way the Communist and Socialist Party songs engaged with local micro-narratives and the way they situated themselves within that larger Marxist meta-narrative. More recently, Teresita Gimenez Maceda has compiled a monograph-length analysis of revolutionary peasant songs from the same period. Unfortunately for the non-Filipino reader, her study is entirely in Tagalog, and so I must admit that I have not been able to read her analysis. She does, however, provide complete transcripts of the songs she collected, many of which are the same ones I recorded or listened to in 1994 and 1996. Indeed, sometimes they had been sung by the same people. The following analysis is based upon my own field notes and translations provided by my wife and another fluent Tagalog-speaking member of her family. I encourage those who want to

29 Taruc, *Born of the People*, p. 37.

work from a more complete and detailed data set to consult Maceda's text.³⁰

Socialist Party choruses sometimes accompanied the theatrical skits as part of the dramatic entertainment, but more often were shared between Party members and the community in the evenings after the festivities had ended. Many of the songs became popular and were repeated year after year by peasants working their fields. Their authorship is therefore impossible to trace, as the lyrics themselves were no doubt subject to local variation and improvisation. As motivational devices, these songs were extremely effective. Roman Catholic symbolism is a common element in many of them. They present local historical interpretations that parallel Christ's Easter Passion and the Old Testament suffering of God's chosen people in Egypt. Frequently, the lyrics depict peasants as "long-suffering slaves" who, due to their patience and purity, can expect to reap the benefits of a new world order.

In the song "Pagasensiyahan Ninyo Itong Aming Inihahandog!" ("Have Patience with this our Suffering"), peasants are told that they do not have to wait until death to live in the Lord's paradise. Rather, through "the justice of God"³¹ a "future of loving and helping each other"³² can be created here on earth. In the same piece, government officials and landowners, because they have violated their culturally prescribed obligations toward the peasants, are described as "prodigal monsters" and referred to as "Judas." In other songs, these same "greedy rich traitors and beasts"³³ are described as having broken their covenant with God and the people, and thereby having caused "chaos" for which "they will have to pay."³⁴

By way of contrast, the PKP songs of the same era are predictably devoid of Christian symbolism. Instead, they call for revolutionary uprising and assert that, if the landowners "do not change their character they should not live."³⁵ While the Socialist lyrics also declare that oppressors

30 Complete Kapampangan and Tagalog transcripts are available in Teresita Gimenez Maceda, *Mga Tingig Mula Sa Ibaba: Kasayayan ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas at Partido Sosyalista ng Pilipinas sa Awit, 1930–1955* [Voices from Below: Motivational Songs of the Philippine Communist and Socialist Parties, 1930–1955] (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), pp. 274, 277, 282, 283–285, 288. I am indebted to my wife (*née* Maria Teresa Tensuan Molina) and her grandmother Coronacion Tensuan for having patiently translated Maceda's Tagalog lyrics into English.

31 "Hustisya ni Bathala" (lyrics from Socialist song entitled "Magbiba Ca O Maluca").

32 "Nasa atin ang kalayaan/Sa pagmahalan at pagdamayan" (lyrics from Socialist song entitled "Pagasensiyahan Ninyo Itong Aming Inihahandog!") ["Have Patience with this our Suffering"].

33 "Mayamang sakim, taksil at ganid" (lyrics from Socialist song entitled "Magbangu Ca Anacpawas").

34 "Taong taksil, kung darating na ang kaguluhan/Magbabayad kayo nang sapilitan" (lyrics from the Socialist song entitled "Balén Qng Siping Mu Ding Anac Mu").

35 "Kung hindi mo tututlan/At hindi magbabago ang ugali mong iyan/Masakim ka at gahaman/Hindi dapat na mabuhay" (lyrics from Communist song entitled "Magbubukid Kaming Lahat" ["We Will All Work"]).

“will have to pay,” their message is tempered by the biblical “Judas” analogy, which suggests that it is not for the poor to kill the rich, but rather, like Christ’s betrayer, the rich must recognize their own immorality and ultimately bring about their own end. Communist songs focus almost exclusively on the theme of labour, referring to all those who “do not work with their hands” as “pitiful.”³⁶

Another significant difference between the two organizations’ songs is the tendency of the Socialist Party to venerate its own leaders. Pedro Abad Santos and Luis Taruc, in particular, are mentioned by name in Socialist music, sometimes in terms reminiscent of biblical prophets. On the other hand, I encountered no Communist Party song that promoted local personalities, although a few engage Filipino cultural images to convey meaning. Several Communist songs do, for example, explain that, since the peasants fed the landlords, the landlords should have been eternally grateful (*utang na loob*); because the landlords are not grateful, they are *walang hiya* (shameless). Overall, however, the Communist songs are far less engaging and make less effective use of culturally or religiously charged symbolism.

Neither the Socialist nor the Communist pre-war songs draw explicit connections between their movements and the Katipunan revolution of the previous generation, although this changed after the Japanese invasion, when the peasants became embroiled in overt military conflicts. The earlier Socialist songs, however, make frequent use of the noun *magdiwang* (spirit), which is also the term used to describe Andres Bonifacio’s faction of the Katipunan. Bonifacio’s Magdiwang represented the worker and peasant camp of the KKK, while Emilio Aguinaldo’s Magdalo group consisted primarily of upper-class Filipino *ilustrados*. The historical significance of the use of *magdiwang* rather than other more common alternative terms would have been obvious to the peasantry.³⁷

In 1938, due to increasing fears of Japanese militarism and in response to the Soviet Union’s call for a United Front, the Philippine Socialist and Communist Parties merged, assuming the latter’s name.³⁸ The Socialists were by far the larger organization in terms of members, but the

36 “Kung kami ay di gagawa/Iwan ang inyong lupa/Kayo rin ang kaawaawa” (lyrics from Communist Party song entitled “Magbubukid Kaming Lahat” [“We Will All Work”]).

37 For a readable discussion of the Philippine revolutions against Spain and America, see Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1989), pp. 106–167. For a Philippine nationalist perspective on these events, see Renato Constantino, *A Past Revisited* (Manila: Renato Constantino, 1975), pp. 150–256. For a contemporaneous account by a Katipunan officer, see Paula Carolina S. Malay’s English translation of Santiago V. Alvarez, *The Katipunan and the Revolution: Memoirs of a General* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992).

38 The new Party’s formal name included a parenthetical phrase: Communist Party of the Philippines (Merger of the Socialist and Communist Parties).

Communist Party was growing fast under the leadership of its largely Moscow-trained intelligentsia.³⁹

Taruc, who, with his mentor Abad Santos, was one of only two Socialists present throughout the merger negotiations,⁴⁰ explained that during talks it was decided that administrative unification would take place immediately, leaving the reconciliation of ideological differences to be worked out gradually over time.⁴¹ William Pomeroy, who as an American soldier served in the Philippines in World War II and later returned to join the Huk movement, becoming a confidant and loyal advisor of PKP leaders, asserts that reconciliation was never necessary; the Socialist Party and Communist Party were, even before the official merger, one and the same — the Socialist Party being simply the public face of the outlawed Communist movement.⁴² According to Pomeroy, Taruc later invented the story of ideological differences to justify his inability to reconcile with the leadership of the Politburo. Indeed, the fact that the Socialist Party had been formed within months of the declaration of the colonial Supreme Court making the Communist Party illegal lends credence to Pomeroy's interpretation. Taruc's explanation, however, is not without merit. While many of the original Communists may have regarded the Socialists simply as their legitimate public face, the Socialists also attracted many more centre-leaning supporters who were reluctant to identify fully with the Communists. More to the point, most extreme leftists abandoned the Socialists to reaffiliate with the Communist Party after Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon returned its legal status in 1937.

Indicative of organizational, if not ideological, distinctions between the two groups is the fact that, for several years after the merger, indeed until the Japanese invasion made unification essential, both the Socialists and Communists retained independent operational structures in the *barrios*. James Allen, an American Communist leader who helped coordinate and then participated in the merger discussions, suggests that perhaps the greatest difference between the two groups was that the Communists were organized according to Stalinist collective structures, whereas the Socialists “had no concept of discipline outside of personal loyalty and obedience to the leader [Pedro Abad Santos].”⁴³ Certainly Taruc was particularly proud of his loyalty to Abad Santos, which he typically defined in conversations with me as a deep and unbreakable personal indebtedness (*utung na loob*). Whatever the exact nature of the merger, there is

39 Allen, *The Radical Left*, pp. 24–29. In 1996 I was able to interview two of the original Moscow-trained PKP members. Both remain strong adherents of “Stalinist” style communism.

40 Allen, *The Radical Left*, p. 48.

41 Taruc emphasized this point repeatedly during interviews with the author in 1994, 1996, and 2004.

42 Pomeroy, interview with author, April 26, 2003.

43 Allen, *The Radical Left*, p. 48.

agreement that, at the unification convention on October 12, the Pampanga representatives of both parties formed a single delegation under the leadership of Luis Taruc. Given Taruc's well-known anxieties over what he had regarded as the Communists' ideological intransigence, this sent a clear message to those Socialists who were still nervous about the merger. As General Secretary of the old Socialist Party, Taruc automatically became a member of the new Communist Party Politburo.

When Japan invaded three years later, the Popular Front members and other organizations convened a congress and unanimously elected Taruc commander-in-chief of the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (People's Anti-Japanese Army), for which the acronym was HUKBALAHAP, or HUKs for short. Still debated today is the question of when the Huks ceased to be the military arm of the multi-member Popular Front and became instead the Communists' army.⁴⁴ What is not disputed is that the Huks were among the biggest and most successful allied resistance movement of World War II.⁴⁵ During the war the Huk army is estimated to have comprised 20,000 men and women under arms and an additional 60,000 active civilian workers.⁴⁶ Its numbers surged beyond these figures as the war neared its end and American forces began liberating the Islands. Building upon the organizational structures established by the Socialist Party, the Huks under Taruc made it impossible for the Japanese ever to gain anything more than the most tenuous control over the Philippine archipelago's productive rice fields in Central Luzon. Additionally, with most of the landlords having fled to Manila at the outbreak of war, the Huks instituted land reform programmes in those areas where they exercised the greatest influence.

Though many war-time leaders struggle to maintain popular support, Taruc's popularity is universally recognized to have remained high throughout the entire Japanese occupation. What has been unacknowledged, however, is the role played by the link between the charismatic young Huk commander and the memory of Felipe Salvador in sustaining Taruc's appeal. At the political level, the Huks adopted most of the Socialist Party's pre-war organizational strategies, and the Japanese invasion caused the focus of their message to parallel increasingly the old KKK emphasis on nationalism. In terms of policy initiatives, an official "Cultural Information Department" (CID) was established to write and produce new dramatic skits and revolutionary songs and to promote other educational endeavours. Beyond these structural similarities,

44 Both Taruc and Pomeroy expressed strong and divergent positions on this question.

45 Senator Millard Tydings, "Remarks of Hon. Millard E. Tydings: Conditions of Philippines Caused by War, and Recommendations for Relief and Rehabilitation," 79th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Doc., vol. 14, nos. 1-77 (Washington, DC, June 7, 1945).

46 Taruc to author, February 27, 1993.

peasants interpreted many of Taruc's personal actions as reinforcing the reincarnation narrative.

Whether such links were serendipitous, consciously cultivated by Taruc, or divinely orchestrated is a matter over which Taruc, his Communist detractors, and many peasants in Central Luzon could never reach agreement. In avoiding the Spanish and American armies, Salvador had used the steep, vegetation-covered slopes of the sacred Mt. Arayat as a military command centre and the site from which he communicated with God. Taruc, for similar military strategic reasons, likewise established Huk headquarters on Mt. Arayat. Salvador visited the labyrinth-like Candaba swamps to commune with the spirit world. Taruc found the impenetrable Candaba swamps a perfect location for a second headquarters on those occasions when Japanese patrols were inspecting Mt. Arayat. Salvador preached that, under ideal spiritual conditions, bolos and clubs could magically transform into rifles during confrontations with the Spanish and Americans. Taruc's recognizance units provided peasant guerrillas with a steady supply of confiscated Japanese weapons and artillery, allowing them to put down their farm implements and join the conflict. Salvador was believed to have been protected from harm by a powerful *anting-anting* (magical amulet). Taruc's consistent ability to escape Japanese bullets and mortar shells gave rise to identical stories.⁴⁷ Taruc's widely recognized gentle and humble character also encouraged and reinforced comparisons to Christ himself. As the war progressed, pronouncements from Taruc were increasingly regarded by many as divinely inspired (Figure 1).

In addition, unlike other Party leaders, Taruc is remembered as having genuinely enjoyed visiting and socializing with his troops during both the war against Japan and the subsequent rebellion against the Philippine Republic. According to William Pomeroy, Taruc took "excessive pleasure" in cultivating relations with his men. The Huk commander-in-chief cooked meals for exhausted soldiers, mended guerilla fighters' tattered clothes, and spent long hours visiting with those under his command as they fraternized around their cooking fires.⁴⁸ For Pomeroy, who remembers discussing these matters with like-minded members of the Politburo, such activities detracted from the important military strategizing that was supposed to occupy Taruc's time. For Jesus Lava, Taruc's principal political antagonist on the Politburo, Taruc's actions were clearly aimed at cultivating personal allegiances among the Huk soldiers. Moreover, they detracted from the

47 Upon being asked about the rumours of his *anting-anting*, Taruc declared that he "did not believe in such things." While he was explaining the superstitious nature of such beliefs to me, two elderly Huk veterans who were in the room politely interrupted and told Taruc that, even if he did not believe it, the *anting-anting* was real and had protected him.

48 Pomeroy, in conversation with author, April 26, 2003.



Figure 1: Luis Taruc and author seated beneath a portrait of a saintly Luis Taruc painted by Marcos Yumul (a cousin of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino) and presented to Taruc (photo in Keith T. Carlson’s private collection).

combatants’ study of Marxist dialectics and the inculcation of Party discipline.⁴⁹ But for Taruc, who years later fondly recalled that in addition to cooking and mending clothes he also administered rudimentary medical aid and provided personal consolation to the wounded, such acts were expected expressions of humility and kindness that he as a fellow peasant and Christian was obliged to provide.⁵⁰

Also contributing to the spread of Taruc’s grass-roots popularity and his alienation from the Communist Party power-brokers was his reputation as a hopeless romantic. During the Japanese occupation, members of the Politburo are said to have criticized him routinely for gathering wild orchids, collecting butterflies, and reciting and composing bourgeois poetry. On more than one occasion in the mid-1990s, I witnessed

⁴⁹ Lava, *Memoirs of a Communist*, p. 141.

⁵⁰ Taruc, in a conversation about his concerns with aspects of Jesus Lava’s *Memoirs of a Communist*, Manila, March 30, 2004.

continuing expressions of Taruc's romantic nature. Once in 1996, while driving down a Central Luzon road, Taruc suddenly pointed out the window of the dilapidated, 1970s-vintage Toyota in which we were riding and insisted that our driver stop. Upon exiting the vehicle, Taruc walked to a small tree and, with a boyish grin and seemingly without concern for what his entourage might be thinking, pointed to a large, brightly coloured butterfly and exclaimed, "I used to collect these during the Japanese times, but I haven't seen one this beautiful in years." For a number of minutes the old Huk Supremo remained fixated by the insect as it sat and slowly opened and closed its wings. Then, after watching it take flight, he returned to the car and quickly picked up the political conversation where he had left it some minutes earlier.

On other occasions, Taruc stopped the car so he could pick fragrant bouquets of wild orchids to deliver to women in neighbouring *barrios*. What is more, without warning and not infrequently while conducting important meetings in his office, Taruc spontaneously recited stanzas of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* or quoted from Grey's *Elegy Written in a County Church Yard*, Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, or one of Jose Rizal's romantic nationalist poems. People in the *barrios* in particular seemed moved and impressed by Taruc's romantic outbursts. His contemporary Communist detractors, however, dismissed the actions as cheap theatrics designed to curry public favour.⁵¹

Taruc's personal following and populist ideology, combined with the spiritual aspects of Huk soldiers, regularly frustrated the hard-line Communists. Throughout the Japanese occupation, relations between the old Socialists and Communists were often strained, but not until after the defeat of Japan and the rise of the collaborator-filled independent Philippine government in the late 1940s did a true schism appear.⁵²

After the Second World War, the Huks were reluctant to return to the landlords the land they had redistributed, especially given that many of the feudal elite had been pre-war members of the Flange movement and then collaborators during the occupation. In exchange for cooperating with those landlords who had not been collaborators, the Huks demanded a more equitable share of the crops under a reformed tenancy system. With an anticipated increase in peasant profits, the Huk leaders hoped that people would ultimately be able to purchase their own farms from their landlords. Taruc, meanwhile, was elected to the Congress of the

51 Celia Mariano and William Pomeroy, conversation with author, April 26, 2003.

52 Taruc devoted a great deal of his second autobiography, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, to presenting his version of the causes of the schism. The Communists, in particular Castro Alejandrino and, until his death in 2004, Jesus Lava, have continued to present their side of the conflict on national radio talk shows as well as in published memoirs. See, in particular, Lava, *Memoirs of a Communist*. See also Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*; Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*.

newly independent Philippine Republic as a member of the Democratic Alliance Party, a broad coalition of leftists and liberals united with the Nationalist Party of Commonwealth-era President Sergio Osmeña (a coalition Taruc later referred to as a continuation of the Popular Front). Indeed, his popularity among peasants was at that time so high that during the campaign Osmeña approached Taruc about becoming his vice-presidential running mate.⁵³

Leading the forces against Osmeña and Taruc was Manuel Roxas of the conservative Liberal Party. The Liberal Party was home to the majority of the pre-war feudal elite, many of whom, like Roxas himself, had been members of the Japanese puppet government. With the explicit support of General Douglas MacArthur (a personal friend to many of the feudal elite), Roxas's Liberals captured the presidency but failed to acquire the two-thirds majority of congressional and senatorial seats needed to pass a constitutional amendment to give "parity rights" to American businessmen operating in an independent Philippine Republic. As a prominent spokesman for the nationalist forces opposing the "parity clause," Taruc occupied a key congressional position. The American government had linked the passing of this amendment to its post-war rehabilitation funding; with Taruc's opposition to "parity," millions of American aid dollars became stuck in a political quagmire.⁵⁴ Although he desired American rehabilitation funds, Taruc considered the parity clause (and the associated Bell Trade Act and Military Base Agreement) unacceptable infringements of Philippine sovereignty, and he refused to compromise. After a few months of political deadlock, Taruc and eight other congressmen and three senators were stripped of their seats on what the Philippine Supreme Court later showed to be falsified charges of electoral fraud and intimidation. Without their opposition, the constitutional amendment passed.⁵⁵

Following the expulsions, relations between the pre-war elite and the peasants rapidly deteriorated, reaching the point of open violence when the Liberals attempted to reinstate the pre-war crop split of 70 per cent in

53 Taruc, conversation with author, March 2005. On other occasions, Taruc described having been invited by Presidents Quezon, Roxas, Quirino, Marcos, and Ramos to assume high positions in their administrations — all of which Taruc refused, with the exception of the presidential appointment as Congressional Representative for agrarian constituents under Marcos.

54 Elsewhere I have documented the complex and often confused process by which the United States government came to link economic rehabilitation with free trade and with preferred American property rights in an independent Philippines. See Keith Thor Carlson, *The Twisted Road to Independence: America's Granting of Independence to the Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1995).

55 For a broad discussion of the issue of Filipino collaboration with the Japanese, see David Joel Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World War II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Hernando J. Abaya, *Betrayal in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1970); Theodore Friend, *The Blue-eyed Enemy: Japan Against the West in Java and Luzon, 1942–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), final chapters.

favour of the landlords. To enforce their will, many landlords turned to private armies or goon-squads that did not hesitate to kill Huk veterans and peasant leaders who opposed them.⁵⁶ With the assassination of well-known Huk Juan Feleo, the die was cast. In 1948 President Roxas declared the Huks an illegal and subversive organization and stepped up counterinsurgent activities. Taruc and others returned to the hills and launched a full-fledged armed struggle against those they identified as the continuing “puppet government.” That year the PKP, which had distanced itself somewhat from the rural peasant movement to concentrate on Manila’s urban proletariat, declared that it would lead the Huks, and in 1950 it publicly described the Huks to be the Party’s military arm in its revolution to overthrow the Philippine government. As Kirkvliet explains, however, the PKP’s control over the Huks was often tenuous and remote. Instead, the people followed Taruc, and, at least initially, Taruc allowed the Party to lead him.⁵⁷

In 1949 Huk military strength was at its peak, morale was high, and popular support strongly behind Taruc. To reach peasants’ hearts and minds, Taruc continued to use Christian stories as his primary medium for communicating his socialist message. However, hard-line Communists in the Politburo were increasingly opposed to this populist approach to revolution. Taruc explained:

My first teacher in Socialism was Christ, and I used his stories to spread our message. And “they” [the Bolsheviks in the Politburo] never dared to stop me. Even if they do their utmost to promote Atheism and Agnosticism. . . . I have not deviated from my Christian principles of “one brotherhood of man . . . under one fatherhood of God” — and that all elements and bounties of nature be common property of the one Family of Mankind — of Filipinos in the case of the Philippines. Meantime, “Land to the tiller,” must be the basic guiding principle of agrarian reform, and their cooperatives must be properly formed. I reject the communes or collective farms which both failed in China and USSR. Which caused the failure of Stalinism and Maoist exclusivism [*sic*].⁵⁸

Today, surviving Huk veterans proudly recall that, during the Japanese occupation and subsequent “Civil War,” the majority of the local Catholic clergy supported their rebel activities.⁵⁹ However, during the

56 Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration*, pp. 117–123, 142–148; Carlson, *The Twisted Road*, pp. 28–53; see also Constantino and Constantino, *The Philippines*, pp. 151–225.

57 Kirkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, pp. 156–202.

58 Taruc to author, June 30, 1994.

59 Almost every Huk veteran I interviewed spoke of the support received from local church officials. Some recalled nuns acting as couriers and priests making special trips into the mountains to provide the rebels with information. Prominently mentioned were Father Guráo of Bongabong, N.E., and Father Barloñan of Baliwag, Bulakan.

conflict it was often impossible for Huks to contact or visit priests. Taruc and other ranking Huk officials therefore assumed the authority to conduct marriages themselves. Taruc also performed baptisms, a ceremony for which the PKP saw no need, but which peasants and Felipe Salvador's reincarnation regarded as important. Recollecting his ecclesiastic activities, Taruc explained that Huk soldiers could not come to the villages for church or state-sanctioned marriages because they were "wanted men":

So I married them in a simple "Huk" ceremony. I'm a priest! [hearty laugh] . . . The Church has allowed us Christians to celebrate marriage or baptism when the Church is in great danger, or when the other way around, when the regular way cannot be done. I would say "I marry you in the name of the Father and Holy Spirit and the Son Jesus Christ." But as a worker, as a farmer, I also witnessed that, "Your pledge today is to be dedicated to country and to produce the food that people needs." That's the kind of ceremony I did. But then I made it colorful. Some suggested that the couple should pass under crossed guns. . . . I am their favorite priest. . . . But that was too much work for me so I delegated to the battalion commander, or to the regimental commander. And you know . . . those married by some archbishop or bishop — they part ways because of money, because of differences in compatibility, of differences in their aristocratic sensibilities, then they have their own bank accounts or industrial enterprises, and they quarrel over it. But those married by me, I've never heard of them separating [laughs]. It's funny and touching.⁶⁰

Taruc's code name or "alias" during the Japanese occupation is also indicative of the image he projected and the way in which he was perceived by his troops and supporters. At the outbreak of the war, he was referred to as "Lipato" or "flying spark." Soon, however, this was changed to "the Pope." Vestiges of this last official Huk *nom de plume* remained long afterward in the affectionate pet name "Pop," which I was told by more than one veteran visiting Taruc's office was an abbreviation of "Pope" and a term that captured the personal, father-like relationship Taruc had established with his followers.

Although the PKP Central Committee repeatedly moved to discredit Taruc and reduce his influence, he was, in the hearts and minds of the peasants and rank-and-file Huks, the "Supremo." In recent conversations, he claimed that he protested the application of the title "Supremo" — he felt it could only appropriately be applied to "God above" — but the peasants (and Manila journalists) would have it no other way.⁶¹ (There can be no

60 Taruc in conversation with author, Tape #20, 1996. For a different discussion and description of the Huk marriage ceremony, see Pomeroy, *The Forest*, p. 142.

61 News accounts from the 1940s and 1950s consistently refer to Taruc as the "Supremo." Interviews with living Huk veterans indicate that the title was unsolicited.

denying, however, that, when his car pulled unannounced into a *barrio* in Central Luzon in the 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century, Taruc often identified himself as “Luis Taruc, Huk Supremo.”) By the late 1940s he had become in the popular imagination even greater than Salvador — he had become the organizational equivalent of Andres Bonifacio, the humble, lower-class clerk who had founded the Katipunan. Bonifacio had been known as “the Katipunan Supremo,” and it seems clear that Taruc was regarded as picking up where Bonifacio had left off after having been betrayed and executed by an *ilus-trado* faction of the KKK.

Indeed, in Taruc’s mind and likely the minds of many peasants as well, the obvious tension between himself and the Communist intelligentsia — in particular the brothers Jose and Jesus Lava and Castro Alejandrino — was eerily reminiscent of the earlier Bonifacio-*ilustrado* conflict. In the two years leading up to his imprisonment by the government, Taruc increasingly worried that plots were being hatched in the Politburo to have him assassinated. In 1996 I conducted an interview with one elderly Moscow-trained PKP leader who admitted that he had been directed by top Politburo members to prepare an assassination of Taruc, but he asserted that he had never actually been ordered to attempt the act. Meanwhile, to build further the connection between the movement he led and the one directed by Bonifacio, Taruc adopted for the Huks aspects of the Katipunan initiation ceremony: “If the Katipunan had their own initiation by signing in blood, we did it also . . . continuing those principles, and proving to the country that we can produce leaders in mind and in activation like Rizal and Bonifacio and Mabini.”⁶² For Taruc and the other peasants of central Luzon, the Huks were not just the heirs of the Katipunan; they were “the continuation.”⁶³

By 1950 Taruc’s use of religious symbols and catechist metaphors was being openly challenged by atheists in the Politburo and Central Committee. Taruc and his younger brother Perigrino (or “Reg”⁶⁴ as he is better known) were the only original Socialist Party members remaining in the PKP’s inner sanctum when the “Bolsheviks” began to establish a new agenda and propaganda campaign. Over the course of a few months, Taruc found himself removed from the Politburo and demoted from his position as chairman of the PKP’s military department and commander-in-chief of the Huk military forces. He was reassigned as a mere organizational secretary and transferred to the most remote province of Northern Luzon. His brother Reg was expelled from the Party.

62 Taruc answering on tape questions posed in a letter from the author, February 1995, Tape #1

63 *Ibid.*

64 Pronounced to rhyme with “peg.”

Just as Taruc was replaced by members of the Party's intelligentsia, so were the entertaining dramas and similar Socialist educational tools replaced with formal "Stalinist Universities." The process of change dated back to the early months of the Second World War when the already merged Socialist and Communists moved to integrate their separate *barrio* organizations. Godofredo Reyes Mallari (code named "Raymond") was appointed the Party's communication officer and oversaw the production of the Huk newspaper. An alumnus of the Stalinist training schools in Moscow, Mallari explained in 1996 that he had sought to recast the Huk dramatic skits to make them both more formal and more explicitly Marxist-Leninist. In his play *Ako I Huk* ("I'm a Huk"), there was no Christian symbolism, and most of the humour that had characterized earlier productions was likewise gone. By the late 1940s Mallari was redirecting PKP communication and training away from theatrical productions altogether and toward monthly "Commander Schools" where military leaders were indoctrinated in Marxist-Leninist thought. Mallari, however, developed reservations about the nature of the prescribed Communist pedagogy. In particular, he opposed teaching young men that a "revolutionary situation existed" when he believed it did not, and as a result he too was expelled from the Party.⁶⁵

Celia Mariano-Pomeroy and her American husband William Pomeroy were quickly appointed to replace Mallari (Mariano as head of the National School Division and Pomeroy as chief of the Propaganda Division).⁶⁶ Under their auspices the "Commander Schools" were transformed into formal "Stalinist Universities." These institutions were established in the mountains to instruct nascent political leaders in the principles of class struggle, democratic centralism, and the standard tenets of Marxist-Leninist thought. As the Party's top communication officers, Mariano and Pomeroy were charged with both curriculum development and instruction. As the couple explained during a 2003 interview, within the university they not only immersed Huk students in study sessions on Marxist dialects and the benefits of Party discipline, but nurtured them in the development of a decolonized mindset through which people would learn to recognize the Catholic Church as a patriarchal institution that propped up feudal and capitalist means of production. At the Stalinist Universities, the husband and wife team taught people who had formerly received only elementary education at the hands of American-run public or missionary schools that religion, faith, and spirituality were superstitious tools of the oppressors and that the Philippines could never truly be free as long as the bourgeois controlled the government and

65 Godofredo Reyes Mallari, in conversation with author, February 3, 1996.

66 Lanzona, "Romancing a Revolutionary," p. 249.

acted as loyal lapdogs of the American neo-colonialists. They also took aim at Taruc's lacklustre support of atheism and his populist approach to raising class consciousness.⁶⁷

The tension between Taruc and the leaders of the Stalinist University was never only ideological and political, however. From the Huk leader's perspective, at least, it was also personal. For Taruc, dealing with William Pomeroy meant having to suppress the jealousy he felt for the American who had captured the heart of his sweetheart, Celia Mariano. Although it is not discussed in any of Taruc's published writings (nor those of Pomeroy), in correspondence and interviews over the course of more than a decade Taruc repeatedly raised the issue of his long-standing love for Mariano (and of her former affection for him). He explained that he had had feelings for Celia from the first time he met her. According to Taruc, he and Mariano had frequently taken long romantic walks together, holding hands and composing and reciting poetry for one another. As time went on, Taruc explained, Mariano and he were developing an ever deeper and more physically expressive love. Then William Pomeroy, who had been assigned the task of living with Taruc for five weeks as preparation for ghost-writing his autobiography, approached him and enquired whether the Huk Supremo would oppose Pomeroy's own courting of the beautiful and intelligent Mariano. Taruc, from his own account, explained that he had no exclusive claim over Celia and that the Politburo's only woman member was free to love whichever man she chose. To Taruc's everlasting chagrin, she chose the tall, dashing American.

When asked in 2003 about Mariano's relationship with Taruc and the context for Pomeroy's request for permission to court her, both Mariano and Pomeroy denied that any of what Taruc had recounted was true; rather, they asserted, he had made it all up. As Jeff Goodwin's survey of archival and secondary sources relating to the Huk rebellion suggest, "sexual relations raised the possibility of divided emotional commitment that could weaken the Huk movement."⁶⁸ In our conversation, Mariano insisted that she and Taruc had never had a relationship of any kind and that she had never been attracted to Taruc. She could never have been in love with him, she explained, because she had immediately seen through his charming exterior and recognized that at his core Taruc was an egotistical man who lacked both the capacity for deep intellectual reasoning and the discipline to follow Party direction.

Pomeroy, likewise, corroborated that he had never asked Taruc or anyone else for permission before striking up a relationship with

67 There is no debate over this fact. The surviving Communist Politburo members have gone on record a number of times reiterating their atheist positions and condemning Taruc for his inability to reject the opiate of the masses.

68 Goodwin, "The Libidinal Constitution," p. 68.

Mariano and that he regretted the naïve admiration he had initially felt for Taruc when he first affiliated with the Huk movement.⁶⁹ His affection for Taruc had long ago been extinguished when in the early 1950s Taruc had made it clear that he would not bend to Politburo decisions. Within this context Pomeroy then referred to the ongoing belief among some peasants that Taruc was the reincarnation of Felipe Salvador as evidence of Taruc's manipulation of the peasantry and as proof that Taruc could not be trusted. He recounted how, when he and Taruc were forced to share a prison cell for several months in the mid-1950s, Taruc read the Bible in preparation for a visit from a busload of people from Candaba who believed him to be the reincarnated Felipe Salvador. Pomeroy said he confronted Taruc about this, accusing him of using both superstition and the opium of the masses intentionally to deceive peasants. For Pomeroy, it was clear that Taruc was committed to self-serving historical revisionism, be the topic his relationship with Mariano, his use of the Salvador reincarnation belief, or his description of the nature of the Communist-Socialist merger.

One might dismiss the Taruc-Pomeroy schism as little more than a particularly nasty case of "tit for tat" with little relevance beyond its personal dimension were it not that Taruc, Pomeroy, and Mariano all derive so much of their status not only from their positions as leading participants in the Huk movement, but as the movement's principal chroniclers. Pomeroy, for example, claims a special ownership over Taruc's first autobiography, which he says is an accurate rendering of the Huk commander-in-chief's beliefs and opinions at the time he collaborated with Pomeroy in composing the text. Taruc, however, steadfastly asserted that Pomeroy, with the support and direction of his Stalinist associates in the Politburo, added the volume's polemical anti-American and anti-nationalist concluding chapters without his knowledge and that these chapters never reflected Taruc's opinions. Each published subsequent volumes and articles denouncing one another.⁷⁰ At stake, for anyone wanting to understand the history of twentieth-century Philippine peasant politics, is the integrity of the voices of those insiders describing it.

The personality clashes, as colourful as they are, are historically interesting primarily for what they help reveal about broader issues. Of course, one need not rely exclusively upon them; others have found different ways of giving expression to eclipsed peasant voices that indeed help

69 There is no mention of a romantic relationship between Celia Mariano and Luis Taruc in any of Pomeroy's writings or Mariano's published lectures and interviews. See Lanzona, "Romancing a Revolutionary."

70 For Taruc, see especially *He Who Rides the Tiger*; for Pomeroy, *The Forest*, as well as his article "The Myths of Counter-insurgency." For a damning exposure of Pomeroy's own historical revisionism, see his exchange with Jonathan Fast in *The New Left Review*, nos. 1–81 (September–October 1973) and 1–83 (January–February 1974).

shed light on the question of Taruc's identity. Ben Kerkvliet has noted, for example, that much of what the Communists were teaching about the achievement of class liberation through the overthrow of feudal capitalism was not necessarily in step with peasant aspirations. Many Filipino rice farmers did not seek the establishment of a Communist state, and neither were they looking to advance the enrichment of the existing capitalist one. Rather, according to the oral histories Kerkvliet recorded in the 1970s, their most common desire was to restore what they considered the reciprocal obligations between tenants and landlords characteristic of the feudalism of their grandparents' generation — only enriched by the benefits of modern agricultural production, industrial communication routes, and a global economy.⁷¹

Whatever their prominence among the Huk and PKP leadership, economic theory and personality clashes were seldom at the forefront of the concerns of average Huk veterans regarding the Party's educational initiatives. Rather, what most contemporary Huks remember as the troublesome feature of the pedagogy of the Stalinist Universities was its perceived immorality. Almost all Huk peasants were staunchly Roman Catholic, and as such were conflicted about certain Communist teachings regarding sex and gender. To this day, a cornerstone of peasant spirituality is its veneration of the Virgin Mary. By extension, a great emphasis is placed upon preserving feminine virtue. Indeed, Huks made the sexual violation of women a capital offence during the Second World War and held Japanese invaders and their own Huk guerillas alike to the same high standards of morality.

According to Taruc, most peasants were so dedicated to Catholic sexual morality that throughout the Japanese occupation it was only ever necessary to try two Huks for violating women. In the first case, a man apparently sneaked up to a sleeping woman and began fondling her breasts. When she woke up and discovered the person touching her was not her husband, she screamed, alerting the *barrio* community. The following day a court proceeding was called. The Huk battery commander served as chairman; the *barrio* captain was the prosecutor, and a member of the accused's unit was chosen to act as defender. After briefly arguing the case, the man confessed. At that point the battery commander informed the woman that under Huk law all power now resided with her. She could forgive the man, in which case he would be disarmed and placed in a position involving the heaviest manual labour for a prescribed time. If she chose not to forgive, the violator would be executed. The woman reportedly replied that she could not forgive him, and so, in Taruc's words, "he was executed immediately." In recounting the story, Taruc took pains to point out that the young man had been extremely

71 Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*.

popular in his unit and home *barrio* and that he was also a renowned fighter who had shown great bravery in combat. However, in Taruc's words, "the dignity of the women had to be respected. This set a precedent. I regret that we had to do this, but we had to."⁷² Within this context, strongly gendered notions pertaining to the sanctity of feminine virtue were seen as central to Huk projections of what a post-feudal, post-Japanese occupation world would be like.

Yet, while the peasant Huks may have adhered to and reinforced particular views concerning the sanctity of feminine virtue, they did not necessarily envision holding women to what in the west (or Japan) would have been considered traditionally feminine societal roles. Though neither the Allies nor the Japanese allowed women in combat, the Huks embraced women who demonstrated the desire and the fortitude regarded as prerequisites for military action. Nor was female participation restricted to roles as low-level scouts or couriers. Several women led Huk squadrons (the most renowned being Remedios Gomez, also known as "Commander Liwayway"). Among these veteran feminine fighters there lingers resentment over the way their superiors in the Politburo traded in the currency of an almost celebrity status and the rhetoric of intellectual exhaustion to justify sexual behaviour that for others was prohibited and deemed immoral.

From the earliest period of the Japanese occupation throughout the HMB times, the PKP Politburo members indulged in what came to be officially referred to as "transient sex relationships" or "sexual opportunism." According to Remedios Gomez Paradiso, commander of Squadron 3V (responsible for provisioning the other 20 squadrons in Region Three), transient sex was widely recognized as immoral and reprehensible. She recalled her feeling at the time that the men in the Politburo who engaged in it, and rationalized it, were undermining the role of all women — especially inasmuch as the privilege was never *de facto* extended to high-ranking women: "They said it was a biological need. I disagreed and opposed this. Part of our cause was to uphold the dignity of women. [In my opinion,] women were not useful just for the sex act."⁷³

So great was the opposition to the increasingly frequent, and increasingly transient, sexual relations characterizing the top PKP leadership that the Politburo eventually felt the need to justify its members' actions publicly. A five-member committee, including Celia Mariano and William Pomeroy, was appointed in the early 1950s to review the situation and come up with recommendations. The result was a policy document

⁷² Taruc in conversation with author, Huk fieldnote book #1, January 24, 1994.

⁷³ Paradiso in conversation with author, Huk fieldnote book #2, Tape #15, January 31, 1996. See also Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*, p. 50.

entitled “The Revolutionary Solution to the Sex Problem.”⁷⁴ The “problem,” the report explained, was that, because of the great emotional stress experienced by Party leaders and the intellectual exhaustion they inevitably felt while coordinating the revolution from their remote mountain lairs, they could not help but become involved in transient sexual relations. The “revolutionary solution” was the creation of a new Stalinist morality that allowed tired and sexually frustrated cadres to relieve themselves through special emotional and sexual outlets. According to the policy, Communist leaders who were married but could not be with their spouses were entitled to involve themselves sexually with new partners — a “second” or *boondoc* (mountain) wife — who likewise could also be married as long as the left-out partners were informed of the situation. In practice, although the prerogatives of the “revolutionary solution” were ostensibly extended to top-ranking PKP women, only those women engaged in sexual relations with top-ranking Party men were ever able to exercise the privilege, and then only as recipients of men’s transient sexual activities. Within this system, the men were regarded as needing sex; women serviced men. As Celia Mariano later explained, it was “men [who] have to fulfill their sexual instincts. They need sex. . . . They could not get along for a month without sexual intercourse. When the urge came, they had to fulfill it.”⁷⁵

The irony of having the husband and wife team of Mariano and Pomeroy (an educated urbanite and her non-Filipino husband) create a policy that sanctioned the “loveless sex” of their principally urban intelligentsia male friends in the Politburo when they themselves had one another and therefore were not affected by otherwise unfulfilled “urges” was not lost on Taruc or others of peasant background. Indeed, as Godofredo Mallari explained in an interview in 1996, a second layer of hypocrisy existed in that during the early 1950s the PKP also approved a policy that made it a crime, punishable by either expulsion from the Party or execution, for a married woman to “go after” and try to seduce another man.⁷⁶ As did the feudal lords who had so long dominated Philippine society with their special economic privileges, so too were the Communist leaders creating double standards of morality that permitted them alone to opt out of rules and customs that others held dear.

74 In 1950 the Philippine government seized five tonnes of PKP documents. These were later used in court to try the leaders of the Communist movement. Microfilm copies of these documents, bearing the eclectic filing system developed by those charged with organizing the records for trial, are available in the University of Philippines Library. See University of the Philippines, Court Exhibits, Secretariat, PKP, “Revolutionary Solution to the Sex Problem,” Politburo Exhibit no. 1–15, O 180, September 12, 1950.

75 Lanzona, “Romancing a Revolutionary,” p. 259.

76 Godofredo Mallari, in conversation with the author, Tape #17, February 3, 1996.

Taruc admitted that, as a Politburo member, he too participated in at least one loveless sexual relationship. He explained, however, that he and his partner ultimately determined to end their affair. In his words, "Our deeply rooted Christian upbringing, our conscience and sense of decency compelled us to put an end to our unedifying relationship."⁷⁷ Perhaps more to the point, engaging in activities that the peasantry widely condemned placed Taruc's popularity (the source of his political power) in a precarious position.

Others, in particular women, have recently corroborated Taruc's description of his own actions. In one group interview session, several elderly Huk women were asked a question concerning Luis Taruc's "well known romanticism." The question was meant to refer to Taruc's propensity for composing and reciting romantic poetry and his habit of collecting flowers and butterflies. The women, however, assumed something else was being implied. One exclaimed, "Ah, what is this? Who says Ka Luis was a womanizer? This is not true!" When the actual meaning of the question was clarified, they relaxed and laughed and went on to explain that Taruc had always treated women with respect — even after his third wife was killed in battle. Taruc would have had no problem finding pretty young women, the elderly women explained between giggles and puffs on their cigars, for he was dashing, handsome, and "so charismatic." But he "never took advantage."

One of the women explained how, during the HMB days, she had lived in close proximity to Taruc for several years both in and out of Huk headquarters and had never seen nor heard of him taking advantage of his celebrity-like status with women. The same, she explained, could not be said of many other top Huk and PKP men, who commonly took advantage of women and "used them as sex objects." The Politburo members never raped anyone, she assured me, but they "seduced ladies" or, more frequently, "submitted to the advances of hero-worshipping, young women."⁷⁸

By the early 1950s Taruc's various differences of opinion with the Politburo's power brokers developed into what Alfredo Saulo characterized as a "full-dress ideological struggle."⁷⁹ After expressing his opposition to the sex policy of the Party's elite, Taruc next strenuously objected to Jesus Lava's and Castro Alejandrino's proposal that military discipline be imposed on the Party's political branches. However, it was the refusal

⁷⁷ Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, p. 64.

⁷⁸ The women participating in this group interview (only part of which was recorded) included Remedios Gomez Paradiso, along with the Huk veteran's secretary (and widow of the Huk commander who liberated Santo Thomas University) and several other elderly women who were visiting Taruc's office from the Central Luzon *barrios*.

⁷⁹ Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*, p. 51.

of the Lava and Alejandrino faction to allow the Party membership to consider Taruc's recommendation of abandoning military tactics in place of parliamentary ones that marked "the beginning of the Lava and Taruc groups' parting of ways."⁸⁰

To alert the Filipino public to the schism within the Huk movement, Taruc circumvented the Communist communication networks controlled by Mariano and Pomeroy and sent President Elpidio Quirino an open letter, which was published in the Philippine *Free Press*. Therein Taruc offered "some humble suggestions on how we [can] combat Communism in the Philippines." The maverick Huk leader invited the president to call a truce, then convene a "national conference of Philippine landlords, churchmen, [and] corporate executives ... to agree on the wholesale division of the land and political reform for the Philippines." He then renounced Soviet Communism as an ideology that "negates the existence of God ... [and] advocates a Godless society. As a Christian, I cannot fathom the depth of the spiritual emptiness of living under such a kind of society." Taruc concluded by stating that Stalinism was "a ruthless form of tyranny perpetuated upon a hapless people."⁸¹

For a number of years prior to the schism, Taruc recently explained, he and his supporters had sought to avoid an open break with the Lava-Alejandrino bloc, not because they thought that ideological reconciliation was probable nor because of Party conventions that categorized "factionalism a serious error," but because of the cultural code of *pakikisama*, or the obligation to "get along."⁸² Within the Philippines, those who through their selfish actions allow a relationship to dissolve are guilty of being *walang pakikisama* (without the ability to get along). This state leads automatically to a condition of *walang hiya* (without shame), the worst possible insult. By allowing others to perceive that he was trying to maintain the Socialist-Communist merger, Taruc was admired by rank-and-file peasants for his adherence to deeply ingrained traditions. On several occasions, Taruc explained that this had been an especially troubling aspect of his relationship with Pomeroy. Not only had Taruc ceded the field with regard to courting Celia Mariano, but on two occasions the Huk Supremo had actually saved Pomeroy's life — once by diving into a river and preventing him from drowning. Taruc's men knew these stories and looked with disfavour upon the harsh treatment he received from Pomeroy and the Lava faction. Years later, when in *The Forest* Pomeroy described Taruc as having saved Celia rather than himself from drowning, Taruc was especially insulted. The apparent inability of hard-line Communists to appreciate the cultural obligation to "get along" and to repay indebtedness (*pakikisama*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ "Proposition from El Supremo," *Time Magazine*, May 19, 1952.

⁸² Taruc in conversation with the author, Tape #20, 1996.

and *loob*), let alone to live by such codes, resulted in what several aged Huk veterans in the 1990s regarded as their “great loss of face” (*hiya*).

By 1953 Huk fortunes were rapidly falling. Even William Pomeroy was coming to appreciate that victory against the American-backed government would be neither swift nor easy. Meanwhile, news of Taruc’s falling-out with the Politburo caused Huk morale to plummet even further. At this point the government forces ambushed the demoted Taruc and his wife, along with both Mariano and Pomeroy. During the skirmish Pomeroy lost his glasses and was captured; Mariano surrendered a few hours later. Taruc escaped, but his wife was killed. Days later, after the soldiers had evacuated the area, Taruc returned to the scene and with his bare hands exhumed his wife’s decomposing body from the makeshift grave where she had been hurriedly buried along with other victims of the battle. The Catholic funeral services he subsequently organized were denounced by the Politburo.

In 1954, discouraged and sickened by all the death, but still retaining strong popular support among Huk soldiers and regarded as leader of the rebels by a Philippine public that refused to believe he had been ejected from the PKP’s inner circle, Taruc unilaterally issued an unauthorized “Call for Peace.” Soon thereafter, he entered discussions with President Magsaysay’s envoy Benigno Aquino Jr. (Ninoy) over what Taruc hoped would be a ceasefire and potential amnesty (Figure 2).⁸³ The negotiations were in reality a trap, and Taruc’s effort at discussion was transformed into a “surrender” by the media.⁸⁴ From Taruc’s perspective, the President “captured” him through fraud and deception. The 40-year-old Huk Supremo was then tried and found guilty of treason and murder — in particular he was blamed for ordering the assassination of President Quezon’s widow. Taruc was handed four life sentences, and on a number of occasions over the following 14 years he came within 24 hours of facing execution.⁸⁵ Then in 1968, long after Taruc’s falling out with the Lava/Pomeroy faction of the PKP had become widely known, President Ferdinand Marcos issued him a conditional pardon.

83 The husband of future president Cory Aquino.

84 This event elevated Benigno Aquino’s career. Eventually, he became the most outspoken and effective critic of Ferdinand Marcos’s Martial Law government and ultimately was assassinated while disembarking an airplane at Manila International Airport after returning from exile in America. Aquino’s wife Cory went on to lead the “People Power Revolution” that toppled the Marcos regime in 1986. Benigno Aquino always resented having been deceived by Magsaysay into trapping Taruc. As penance for his role in Taruc’s “capture,” he adopted Taruc’s only son Romeo and financed his way through medical school. For Aquino’s immediate account of Taruc’s capture, see the article published in *Time Magazine*, May 31, 1954.

85 Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, chap. 7 (“More Errors”), chap. 8 (“Surrender”), chap. 9 (“The Godless are Loveless”).

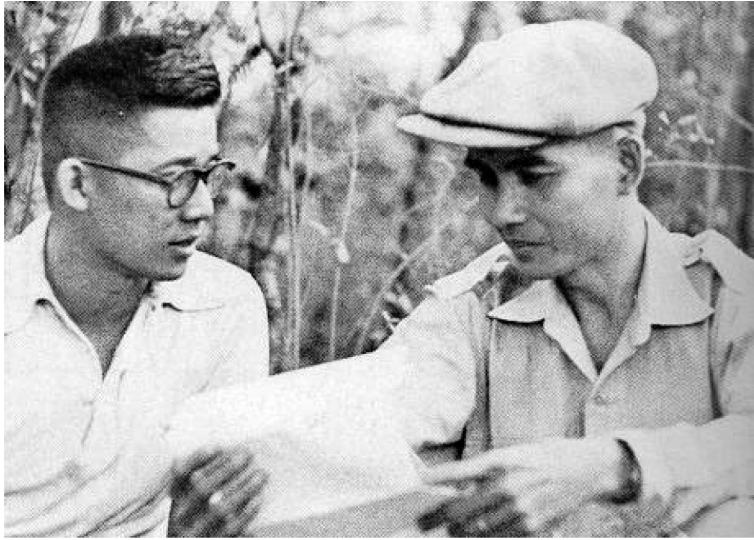


Figure 2: Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino (left) and Luis Taruc reviewing President Raymond Magsaysay’s response to Taruc’s call for peace, 1954 (copy of photo that appeared in *Manila Times*, Taruc’s personal collection).

Though the Huk rebellion had been in decline for over two years, Taruc’s imprisonment effectively sounded its death knell. The arrest of the Politburo-In (the urban Manila wing of the Politburo), along with the seizure of five tonnes of PKP documents, broke the movement’s administrative back just as Taruc’s arrest stripped the movement of its soul. Thereafter a small cadre of hard-line Stalinists dominated what was left of the PKP. Their refusal to embrace the myth of the Katipunan, the ideology of Philippine nationalism, or the spirituality of Salvador guaranteed that they would never develop mass support, and by the mid-1960s the Huks and Communists were a spent force — the remainder (under the command of Taruc’s relative Pedro Taruc) were widely recognized as gangsters, not social revolutionaries. The subsequent decades witnessed a radical peasant revival of sorts under a new generation of Filipino Communists of the Maoist variety called the New People’s Army (NPA).⁸⁶ The most prominent of these new Communists were Jose Ma Sison and Bernabe Buscayno (known as “Commander Dante”), but, like the original Filipino Stalinists, these later Marxists also failed to generate the wide popular support enjoyed by Salvador, Bonifacio, or Taruc.

⁸⁶ See Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989).

Few countries have appeared as potentially ripe for Communist propaganda and insurrection as the Philippines in the mid-to-late twentieth century, and yet the orthodox Communist meta-narrative consistently failed to resonate with the Filipino peasantry. Others have pointed out that the Communists were inattentive to specific peasant desires, preferring to “lead” the people into revolution, but these studies have focused primarily upon articulated peasant grievances.⁸⁷ Looking beyond a comparison of peasant conditions and rebel promises to an analysis of the manner in which the peasant agenda was construed and conveyed provides an alternative means of interpretation. It allows glimpses of insiders’ perspectives on global events as they played out on local fields.

Taruc initially succeeded where the Communists failed not simply because he was able to read his audience and appeal to their needs. Indeed, Taruc did much more than tailor an indigenous micro-narrative to suit ideological concerns. Neither was his success a mere product of having been “born of the people.” Rather, by refusing to denounce the reincarnation belief and by showing people that he sought to live up to the legacy of Felipe Salvador, Taruc linked historical narratives to contemporary issues and projected a future that, unlike the one originating with his Communist colleagues and detractors, engaged a deeply embedded peasant spirituality.

Subsequent to his release from prison, Taruc continued to work for agrarian reform, democratic renewal, and the development of a nationalist consciousness. Yet, despite the fact that he retained celebrity status among the people of Central Luzon’s *barrios*, there can be no denying that some of the earlier magic of his message had faded — especially among urban leftists. Indeed, his cozy relationship with the Marcos regime suggested the Old Huk Supremo had compromised himself. His 1967 autobiography, *He Who Rides the Tiger* (a bold and explicit denunciation of his former Communist allies and a renunciation of violent means to social change) read too much like a plea-bargain from a man who had grown tired of prison.

Those who regarded Taruc a sell-out pointed to how he now sought to facilitate reform through existing state power structures — and in the Philippines such activities were inevitably associated with graft and corruption. The tipping point for many of those who had initially given Taruc the benefit of the doubt came in 1972 when the Old Huk Supremo publicly supported President Ferdinand Marcos’s declaration of Martial Law, despite (or perhaps because of) his own imprisonment for eight months by one of Marcos’s zealous generals immediately following Proclamation 1081. Likely as a reward for this support, Taruc sat as a presidentially appointed assemblyman in the Philippine National Congress from 1978

87 For example, Kerkvliet’s *The Huk Rebellion*.

to 1992, representing peasant and labour interests. More recently he acted as “Special Adviser on Agrarian Reform and the Urban Poor” for the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Though Taruc adamantly denied that he received any political direction from Marcos or any of the kick-backs offered him as an assemblyman,⁸⁸ choosing these methods eliminated any chance for reconciliation with his old PKP comrades and caused him to incur the distain of Sison’s new Maoists.

With the exception of Taruc’s old Stalinist antagonists, Jose Sison was undoubtedly Taruc’s most ardent and damaging critic. Months prior to the release of *He Who Rides the Tiger*, Sison had visited Taruc in prison to enlist the Huk leader’s support for the formation of a new post-Lava Communist Party. When Taruc informed Sison that he would not endorse violent, non-parliamentary means to political transformation and advised Sison that he should “follow the lead not only of Marx and Mao, but of Rizal, Bonifacio and Christ,” the young Maoist dismissed Taruc as a “revisionist.”⁸⁹ In a series of stinging articles in *Ang Bayan* (the voice of the new Communist Party), Sison attacked Taruc as a “traitor and a scab” who had abandoned the revolution “for the applause of bourgeois audiences and [the] patronage of the reactionary government.”⁹⁰ From 1968 until his death in 2005, Taruc was caught in the impossible position of having to defend himself from attacks from both the Stalinists and the Maoists on the left, as well as reactionaries on the right who regarded his “conversion” as mere political posturing.⁹¹

Over time, even those who had come to appreciate that Taruc was not a traitor to his class questioned whether his close relations with the nation’s top political power brokers rendered him a patsy. Certain progressive journalists in the 1990s, for instance, claimed that the government was exploiting Taruc’s continued popularity among the peasantry to give its token land reform programmes an air of legitimacy.⁹² As one radio host somewhat

88 Taruc was particularly sensitive to accusations that he was personally benefiting financially from his political activities. On numerous occasions he spoke of how he, like other assemblymen, was offered kick-backs and political pay-offs but constantly refused them to demonstrate his integrity as a “man of the people.”

89 Taruc in conversation with author, March 30, 2004.

90 Jose Sison, “Supreme Council Paves Way for the Release of Political Prisoners,” *Ang Bayan*, no. 11.

91 Although Sison’s pen stung Taruc, the Old Huk Supremo also found within the pages of *Ang Bayan* much to admire in the new generation of peasant leaders. Like Taruc, Sison too had lost respect for the Lava faction that controlled what remained of the PKP. If Sison’s writings can be considered a dismissal of Taruc, they are an unequivocal damning of “the Lava revisionist renegade clique.” In Sison’s eyes, Pomeroy and the Lava group were primarily responsible for “obstructing and sabotaging the advance of Mao Tsetung Thought” through their insistence on leading the peasants with Stalinist ideology and for the nepotism that characterized their political tenure. See, for example, Sison, “Intensify Party Rebuilding and the Armed Struggle,” *Ang Bayan*.

92 Various national radio programmes; interview with “Raymond” (Godofredo Reyes Mallari), Manila, 1996. Mallari was one of the earliest Moscow-trained Filipino Communists. Later he was allegedly

paternalistically confided to me during the course of an interview, "If the peasants see a government agent with Taruc they automatically think the programme has Taruc's support, even if Ka Luis only came with the agent because he needed a ride to visit the *barrio* people and promote his own agenda of rural reform. . . . The people are too simple. They don't understand what the government official is saying. All they know is that he has arrived with Ka Luis and therefore must be good."⁹³

During pensive moments, Taruc acknowledged that successive presidents, from Sergio Osmeña to Ferdinand Marcos through to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, had legitimized their actions by attaching his name to their policies and programmes. With sadness in his voice, for example, he acknowledged that the 2004 appointment of his son Romeo Taruc as a special presidential advisor had less to do with Romeo's own track record in the field of social justice than it did with the still powerful resonance that the name Taruc carries with the rural poor of Central Luzon.⁹⁴

If Luis Taruc recognized that he had allowed himself to be exploited, however, he refused to regard himself as a patsy; there can be no denying that Taruc's consistent mass appeal among the peasantry prevented him from ever having to compromise himself entirely. He rejected the notion that he was unable to work for, and see progress toward, genuine social and political change while cooperating with powerful government agents. In his mind, what his critics characterized as hypocrisy and opportunism were really pragmatism and accommodation — and in creating opportunities for cross-class cooperation, he asserted, he was always consistent. For Taruc, nationalism (national identity) sometimes trumped class identity; religion or faith sometimes trumped economic determinism; culture sometimes trumped ideology; and personal loyalties sometimes trumped Party discipline. Taruc's refusal to be pigeonholed and his insistence that he be allowed the freedom to change his mind and revise his views were both his political strength and the root of his political failure.

Taruc recognized that power and agency inevitably nest in varying degrees on both sides of any relationship. Responding in January 1996 to specific media accusations that he was a sell-out for accepting a vehicle in exchange for appearing to support right-wing government policies, Taruc explained:

They provide me with a jeep and a driver to go to the provinces to speak with, and to, the *tao* — the peasants. To attend a rally. Then the politician arrives by limo, or maybe helicopter. They say their thing, and if it is good

associated with the Politburo's plan to "liquidate" Taruc. See also interview with Celia and William Pomeroy, London, June 2003; Lava, *Memoirs of a Communist*.

93 "Juan dela Cruz" [pseudonym] in conversation with the author, Tape #6, January 24, 1996. This particular journalist requested that I not disclose his identity.

94 Taruc in conversation with the author, January 2004.

I support it. But I also criticize the government for what has not been done. But then, ahhh, but then, I stay and speak with the people after the politician's helicopter has gone. I listen to their problems. I promote co-operatives. I assist them get their veteran's benefits. And I do what I have always done. I encourage them to act for themselves to make real change happen. To think for themselves. If I did not co-operate with the politicians I would not have access to the jeep and the gas and the driver — I need to get back and forth between Manila and Pampanga.

For Taruc, accomodation had always come at a price. If his relationship with Marcos and other mainstream political power-brokers compromised him during his later years, it was no less detrimental to himself, or the movement he championed, than the earlier relationship he had cultivated with the Communist leaders of the PKP.

What does the future hold for Luis Taruc's vision of an indigenously Filipino, peasant-directed process of social reform? Until just weeks before his death, Taruc still lived a life of poverty, actively advocating peasant interests from a cluttered office in a dilapidated house whose centre rooms could not be occupied for fear of the roof collapsing. He regularly spent eight hours a day, seven days a week, working from this space with a small cadre of supporters helping to ensure HUKBALAHAP veterans received government pensions and recognition for their role in fighting the Japanese. Most nights he also dedicated an hour to speaking about agrarian reform on a national public radio "call-in" show. He continued to organize and attend peasant rallies, while communicating with congressmen and senators on a daily basis. Taruc additionally took time to reach out to a non-Filipino academic audience. Aside from his interviews with me, he had recently been working with scholars from the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia.

The meta-narratives of both western modernity and communism, it seems, had features that appealed to Taruc, but neither fully captured his imagination nor spoke to local peasant issues in a way that he and his comrades in the *barrios* found completely satisfying. Despite his association with socialist intellectuals like Abad Santos, nationalist feudal politicians like Manuel Quezon, and the intelligentsia of the PKP, Taruc consistently interpreted the world through lenses that were tinted by peasant Catholic spirituality and traditional Filipino cultural tenets. The competing micro-narrative he espoused was inevitably ideologically naïve — or, in the words of William Pomeroy and Celia Mariano, "lacking in ideological sophistication."⁹⁵ At least as clear as the influence

95 Taruc, for example, claimed that, during his conflict with the PKP Politburo members, he coined and often repeated the phrase, "Capitalism must be socialized, and Communists must democratize" (Taruc in conversation with author, January 20, 1994).

of Marx and Lenin was that of American missionary school teachers who provided Taruc as a child with a steady diet of Horatio Alger novels and discussions of the speeches of Lincoln and Jefferson. Though he lamented the erosion of peasant epistemologies, Taruc also found ironic social progress in the establishment of a McDonald's restaurant on a rural highway in Central Luzon: "I know they are an American multinational corporation, but where else will you find a barefoot peasant sitting down in the same room beside a businessman in a suit. Where else will the prices be the same no matter who orders the food? Maybe McDonald's will help people speak to one another and then understand one another."

In the end, his perceived role in history was a growing concern for the elderly Taruc. He was very pleased when in 1994, after protest from a number of academics, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* reversed an editorial board decision to drop the "Taruc" article that had appeared since 1953. Taruc and I were working on a second edition of his first autobiography at the time of his death. Recognition by South African President Nelson Mandela, who publicly stated that Taruc was a key "inspiration" for his anti-apartheid movement, did much to raise Taruc's national and international profile, as did word that Fidel Castro had once referred to the Huk Supremo as a role model.⁹⁶ His more local legacy, however, was an ongoing preoccupation. In his last years he became increasingly worried with what he saw as the undermining of traditional Filipino cultural values, and he not infrequently criticized even his closest relatives for "acting too American." Though he never expressed it verbally, his pensive sighs during quiet moments suggested that he worried whether, after his death, might another reincarnation occur?

96 The following story is found under the title "Mandela Lauds ex-Huk Leader" on the front page of Manila's daily newspaper, *The Philippine Inquirer*, March 3, 1997: "South African President Nelson Mandela, a global symbol of the long fight against racism, finally met the man who, he said, inspired him. Mandela yesterday shook hands with former Huk Supremo Luis Taruc shortly after University of the Philippines officials conferred a doctorate of laws honorary degree on the visiting leader. The two men chatted for awhile, after which Taruc declared, 'I feel elated.' Mandela, a political prisoner for 27 years who became the first president of post-apartheid South Africa, explained that he was 'inspired' by Taruc. Mandela had read Taruc's book, *Born of the People*. During his inauguration as president in May 1994, Mandela even cited Taruc." According to reports, when former Philippine Ambassador to South Africa Leonides Caday went to Mandela in Pretoria to present his diplomatic credentials, the South African president told him, "Please don't praise me too much. I just followed what your own Luis Taruc wrote in his wonderful book, *Born of the People*." Caday apparently was surprised that Mandela could actually quote from Taruc's autobiography. Retrieved from <http://www.newsflash.org/2003/05/ht/ht004141.htm>.